



# Interagency Ecological Program

Review of Study Concepts and Proposals for 2010, Page 1 of 3

## Review Process and Criteria

for

### Study Concepts and Full Proposals

to be considered for further development and funding as part of the  
**2010 IEP Pelagic Organism Decline Workplan**

## I. Review Overview

The [Interagency Ecological Program](#) for the San Francisco estuary (IEP) has issued an open “[Call for Study Concepts to be considered for further development and funding as part of the 2010 IEP Pelagic Organism Decline \(POD\) Workplan](#).” This document describes the review process and criteria used to evaluate the submitted study concepts and invited full proposals and the next steps leading to the completion of the 2010 POD Workplan. In short, study concepts undergo an internal IEP review and authors of highly ranked study concepts are invited to submit full study proposals. After internal IEP review of the full proposals, successful proposals are recommended for funding as part of the 2010 POD Workplan. The anticipated funding length for the new studies is one year with a possibility (but no guarantee) of no-cost extensions and funding supplementation or renewals.

The IEP review is modeled after NSF and CALFED proposal reviews to ensure a “fair, competitive, transparent merit review process.” In contrast to the NSF and CALFED, however, the IEP does NOT conduct an independent outside expert review of the study concepts and full proposals due to lack of funding, time, and personnel for such a process, and the relatively much smaller amount of available IEP research funding. Instead, all study concepts and full proposals undergo an internal merit review by [IEP and POD Management Team members and IEP Coordinators](#). Members of these IEP groups have broad expertise in estuarine ecology and management. In addition, it is anticipated that the complete 2010 IEP POD workplan will undergo an independent outside expert review conducted by the CALFED Science Program.

## II. Review Process

Each study concept submitted on a [study concept form](#) by the due date is evaluated in detail by at least one IEP or POD Management Team member. Each reviewer fills out a review worksheet which includes the review criteria and additional considerations detailed below. The resulting ratings and recommendations are discussed and confirmed or adjusted by group decision during a special review meeting. Summaries of the discussion and recommendations are provided to the IEP Coordinators. After further review and discussion, the IEP Coordinators finalize the list of study concepts recommended for full proposal development.



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The authors of recommended study concepts are then invited to submit full study proposals. These proposals have to include all requested information and follow a standard outline (see separate document). The full proposals are reviewed in a similar manner as the study concepts resulting in a final ranked list of studies recommended for funding as part of the 2010 POD Workplan. Based on available funding, some or all proposals may be funded, starting with the top ranked proposals. In some cases, only parts of proposed studies may be recommended for funding, or investigators may be asked to modify their proposed study to allow for better integration into the overall POD Workplan and/or coordination with other POD studies.

All study concepts and full proposals remain confidential during the IEP review process. Detailed descriptions of studies recommended for funding are made publicly available in the draft and final POD Workplans.

### III. Review criteria and rating

Following the NSF and CALFED models, the IEP is using three merit review criteria to evaluate study concepts and full proposals:

1. Technical merit;
2. Likelihood of success;
3. Added Value.

Each of the three merit review criteria is further broken down into a number of specific considerations. These considerations are intended to help define the criteria and conduct a thorough and balanced review. The considerations, along with additional comments, produce an overall rating for each of the three criteria according to the rating scale given below. Not all considerations may apply to each study concept or proposal. Because of their brevity, study concepts may often not provide enough detail to quantitatively evaluate all considerations that do apply.

*Considerations for the three merit review criteria:*

#### 1. Technical merit:

The technical merit criterion considers how technically sound the proposed study is. Considerations include: What are its greatest technical strengths and weaknesses? How scientifically sound is the proposed study? To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts? How well conceived and organized is the proposed activity?



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## 2. Likelihood of success:

This criterion evaluates the likelihood that proponents will accomplish the project goals. Considerations include: How well qualified is the proposer (individual or team) to conduct the study? (If appropriate, the reviewer will comment on the quality of prior work.) Is there sufficient access to resources? Is the budget appropriate? Is the approach sufficiently documented and technically feasible? Is the scale of the study consistent with the objectives and within the grasp of the authors?

## 3. Added value:

The added value criterion considers which studies are most likely to give the IEP the highest quality and quantity of additional information for the cost. Some ways to consider added value include how much information is added to the base of knowledge, how well the study concept addresses the priority research topics and questions in the call for study concepts, how well the study would leverage existing studies, how much it might contribute to science infrastructure improvements, and how useful the expected results might be for monitoring, research, modeling, and management.

### *Rating Scale for Merit Review Criteria Considerations:*

- 4 = Superior: Outstanding in all respects with no technical concerns. Complete confidence proponents will accomplish the project goals. Great value.
- 3 = Above Average: A very good proposal with no significant technical concerns. Very confident proponents will accomplish the project goals. Good value.
- 2 = Below average: A reasonable proposal with some technical deficiencies but no “deal breakers.” Fairly confident proponents will accomplish most of their project goals. Moderate value.
- 1 = Inadequate: A technically deficient proposal with serious impediments or concerns. Little confidence proponents will accomplish many project goals. Low value.

These ratings along with a review discussion by the IEP and POD Management Team members and the IEP Coordinators provide the basis for the ranking of all study concepts or proposals as “highly recommended” (Tier A), “recommended” (Tier B) or “not recommended” (Tier C) for further development and funding as part of the 2010 IEP POD Workplan. Proposals Tiers A and B will be further ranked as high (1), intermediate (2), and lower (3) funding priority in each Tier.

### **For more information, please contact:**

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